

Mayor Mike Winder

State of the City

February 5, 2013

Go West

Since the days when ships first sailed into the Atlantic sunset from the Old World, since the time when wagons rumbled along dusty trails headed for the Rockies, since the era when the clickety clack of the iron horse brought settlers across the wide plains and into these valleys, there has been opportunity sought by those who go west.

As pioneers arrived to a quickly filling up valley, they chose to continue on west, over Jordan, to homestead their farms and till the rich earth. As immigrants showed up to a valley already well established, they once again looked to the west for their land of opportunity, here among the diversity and affordability of our community. And as businesses, entrepreneurs, and young professionals today look for their land of opportunity, they are coming into the west in record numbers to this city, prospering in the sunset shadows of the Oquirrh Mountains.

“Go West, young man,” evangelized Horace Greeley, the most famous newspaper man of the nineteenth century, “Go west, young man, and grow up with the country.” His words ring true today, for it is this side of the Salt Lake Valley, in this fresh time and in this young place where opportunities still abound.

To illustrate, last year we issued over 400 building permits for over \$115 million worth of construction projects, both residential and commercial. This places us 4th in the state for construction activity, alongside other booming communities in Utah.

The housing market is picking up, with the number of permits for single-family homes in 2012 more than double the number in 2011. We are also seeing the first Class A apartment towers coming to our city, with a \$25 million project ready for construction in Fairbourne Station and another \$30 million multi-family project in Highbury. The market is demanding a variety of housing options in our city, and we are seeing some of the finest quality projects in the state being put forward. People are coming west.

Part of why people love West Valley City is that they feel welcome here. This is a community where Utah's largest Asian community is greeted by one of the finest Chinese Friendship Gates in the United States, which was dedicated at our Utah Cultural Celebration Center last fall. This is a community where we came together with leaders of various faiths for our first Martin Luther King Day service last month, and where we named a road after Rosa Parks last year, who by the way was born 100 years ago yesterday. This is a community where pet owners are proud that we are working with animal advocacy groups to become the first city with a "no-kill" animal shelter in the state. People feel welcome in this, Utah's most diverse city.

Business is booming and we are becoming well known as the most aggressive economic development department in the state. In fact, our Community and Economic Development Department was recognized as tops among their peers with a "Best of

State” medal and even recognized as one of the finest community development groups in the state—public or private—with a “Best of State” statue.

ChamberWest saw fifty ribbon cuttings last year, from Buffalo Wild Wings and Target on 5600 West to the new \$25 million, state-of-the-art movie theater at Valley Fair Mall. This newest of Miller Megaplex’s is their first to have all leather seating, and one of the few in the nation to have D-box motion seats, high frame rate picture clarity, and sound so realistic that you have to look up to see if it is really raining on you or not. This helped auto traffic at Valley Fair Mall to be up 60% on Black Friday 2012 from a year prior.

Our plans for the half-billion dollar Fairbourne Station development continue on schedule, with the opening of the full-service Embassy Suites hotel last month. This cornerstone of our new city center is a 7-story, \$33 million contribution to our skyline and boasts the first Shula’s Grill in Utah.

More and more people are going west to West Valley City not just for movies and malls, but for jobs. At a time when much of the nation remains mired in the Great Recession, composite fiber manufacturer Hexcel in our city is continuing a \$450 million expansion, a \$20 million North American headquarters for Petzl Corporation will be under construction soon, and a new 1,000 acre Economic Development Area for distribution and manufacturing has been established in the northwest corner of our city.

We have seen more jobs created in our city this past year than in any of the past three years, bringing our three year total to over 5,000 new jobs. These are not just statistics, these are livelihoods for thousands of families in our area in a variety of industries. We commend our staff in all departments that works with us to foster a culture encouraging of economic investment, and we commend our many private sector partners who look to the west for their next opportunity.

And yet in a world of accelerating development, we do not neglect the value of nature and wide open spaces, here in the west. Our city has two new parks and 204 more trees in parks than last year. We are presently working with our partners at Salt Lake County for creating more parks from the shores of the Jordan River to the foothills of the Oquirrh, and expanding trails alongside the canals, as well.

And we are efficient with our open spaces, utilizing over 1,400 volunteer hours last year in our parks and golf courses. We use less water per acre in maintaining West Valley City parks than even the lofty standards set by the Demonstration Gardens of the Jordan Valley Water Conservancy.

Here in the west we are also leveraging change to create opportunity. As the new Mountain View Corridor slices through the western part of our city, two miles of trails have been opened alongside the new highway. The former West Ridge Golf Course, disrupted by the new highway, will reemerge this July as Utah's newest golf course, The Ridge, with unparalleled views and unique holes.

The Mountain View Corridor was opened last year from 5400 South to 16000 South, enhancing our connectivity with the southwest areas of this valley. We've seen other great transportation developments, besides.

In 2012, TRAX ridership on the West Valley light rail line continued to grow, increasing 17% from when it opened in 2011. Innovations in road travel have also been made as we partnered with UDOT to improve traffic flow at the Bangerter Highway intersections, and as we have better coordinated our traffic signals.

To travel on 4100 South from one end of our city to the other, it is now six minutes quicker going eastbound in the mornings than in 2009, and ten minutes quicker going westbound in the evening commute. To actually feel traffic lessening as the city is growing is a truly remarkable achievement, and one that affects for good the quality of residents' lives every day.

In 2012, nearly six miles of road were repaved at a cost of \$1.6 million. As a result of this work, the average condition of all our major streets improved by 7%. In these many ways, it is easier to "Go West" than ever before!

Throughout history, the love of the west is also coupled with the love of the land. Here in West Valley City we are doing big things to protect land and air, saving taxpayer dollars while we're at it.

Last year, over 6,000 tons of waste were recycled by city residents and our contractor, Waste Management. That represents a 1.5% reduction in landfilled waste at

the Salt Lake Valley Landfill, or enough waste to fill these Council Chambers 30 times. This effort saved the City \$148,000 in landfill tipping fees.

In 2012, lighting, heating and air conditioning improvements in ten city buildings were completed. These improvements will save over 700,000 kilowatt hours of electricity annually, according to Rocky Mountain Power. This is enough power to supply the homes of 55 families of four.

Environmental actions not only save money, but we find they can save lives. Our fire department last year initiated a paperless system for medical transports to this effect. They also became the first fire department in the state to utilize the newest style patient lift system in their new transport engine.

Regarding public safety, people often worry that the west is more wild than it is. People who wonder why a West Valley City crime story appears on the news more often than one about their town forget how big we are. West Valley City, with 132,000 people, has as many residents as Saratoga Springs, Centerville, Highland, Farmington, Herriman, Brigham City, and Holladay COMBINED. We are Utah's second largest city and cover over 35 square miles.

On a per capita level, our violent crime and property crime rates are lower than several Utah cities, townships, and unincorporated areas. Nationally, our crime rates are average for a city of our size.

But most importantly, our city continues to get safer. There were 11% fewer crimes committed in our city last year than in 2009.

Out here in the west, our city's finances are healthy, and not by accident. We continue to look for ways to be smarter with our precious dollars. For example, last year we took our utility billing "in house". Rather than paying Rocky Mountain Power to include these bills in their statements we now send out over 27,000 bills and process them ourselves. This has increased our accuracy, transparency, and efficiency in billing and interaction with our citizens.

While many Utah communities raised taxes last year, we did not. We held the line on spending and lived within our means. This, coupled with our growing economic development, led Fitch Ratings to upgrade our bond rating at the end of last year.

Our city was awarded the "Distinguished Budget Award" for the 22nd year last year and the "Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting" for the 21st time by the Government Finance Officers Association. These awards represent the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and reporting. This is a significant achievement and demonstrates the consistent efforts and expertise of the finance department to prepare and present accurate and high quality financial documents.

So where do we go from here? How do we keep the dream alive that the real opportunities lie in the west? How do we continue to improve our public safety, our public well-being, and our quality of public life?

Recently, as elected officials, we asked the public what areas they wanted us to focus on as a city. Where were their concerns? Where did they see opportunity? We gathered feedback on the city website, through social media, and through our annual resident survey. The “suggestion box” was open, and we appreciated the many who took time to share with us what they’d like us to focus on.

Then taking all of that feedback, our city council members, our city manager Wayne Pyle and assistant city manager Paul Isaac and I met over the weekend in our annual strategic plan retreat. For hours on end we combed through the suggestions, brainstormed ideas of our own, and ultimately voted on six key goals that we can focus on as a city for the coming year.

What emerged in these six goals was a focus on neighborhoods, because at the end of the day it is our homes and those around us that affect us most. In the original 1929 musical *Showboat*, we hear the moving voices singing the lyrics of the old spiritual, “Deep River, My home is over Jordan.” And so it is with us, the inheritors of the community “over Jordan” as the west side was called in Utah’s territorial days. It is because it is our home we love it so. It is because it is our home that neighborhoods matter so much.

In the spirit of my theme tonight, to Go West, I have arranged these six goals in an order that fits with the pneumonic device G-O-W-E-S-T.

“G” is for guardians. The guardians of public safety in our community are the brave men and women of the West Valley City Police Department. People feel safer when they see the men and women in blue driving down their streets, patrolling a neighborhood shopping center, and out in the community. Criminal mischief is discouraged in areas where these protectors of the peace frequent. So our first big goal for the coming year is this: **Have a more visible police presence on our neighborhood streets and in our public spaces.**

“O” is for original. West Valley City is unique from every other city in Utah. We have our own stories and heritage, a past built on farmers, miners, laborers, entrepreneurs and immigrants. We are not your typical Utah suburb, and yet we are not the urban capital city either. We are a unique place, working hard as leaders with our private sector partners to create original places—destinations unlike anywhere else in Utah. So we charge our city staff with this goal: **Have each department in the city find ways to make the city unique, meaningful and interesting.** It is not just enough to be a functional and efficient government. We are partners with the community in genuine “place making” and the results should not be Anywhere, USA. It should not be said of West Valley City, as it has with so many cities in suburban America “there is no there there.” We are original, and want to continue to build upon that.

“W” is for “We the people”. It was Theodore Roosevelt who said, “We are the government, you and I!” Any great American city has a special class of residents who have realized this vision and who have felt empowered by City Hall to seize the great

opportunities of being community leaders, neighborhood builders, and in the words of Peter Kageyama, founder of the Creative Cities Summit, city “co-creators.”

We realize that not everyone in a city has the time, interest, or energy in giving back to their community as a co-creator, but we do realize that West Valley City would be incredibly enhanced if we had more neighborhood association leaders like Doris Wall and Renee Layton. We would be so much richer as a community if we had more people like Jeff and Pat Deelstra on city volunteer boards and committees. And we would have an even more in-touch municipal government if we had more amazing city employees like Kevin Conde, Nancy Day and Cindy Hobbs who actually lived in the city they worked for. We realize in a metro area like ours it is unrealistic to have every city employee live inside the city, and frankly, we want the best and brightest regardless of where they live to be on city staff, helping us reach our potential. But as elected officials we also feel that the city employee that lives in the city gains unmatched community knowledge and develops a special passion for this place that can only be acquired by experiencing in real time the stores, schools, and services that our residents do.

So how many of these “co-creators” does our city need to have to be that leaven to help us rise, to provide that salt that gives our city its savor? Kageyama in his book *For the Love of Cities* suggests that “a medium sized city could significantly increase its energy, enthusiasm, and creativity by adding only a hundred or so passionate co-creators.” He proposes one-tenth of 1%. Looking at this and our city population of 132,000, the City Council and I came up with the next big goal: **Have 132 residents**

involved in city employment, city boards or neighborhood associations by the end of the year.

“E” is for education, specifically higher education. As elected officials, we were disturbed by the recent findings showing that only 12.8% of adults in our city have a college degree. This is less than half the state average and towards the lower end of cities along the Wasatch Front. Now, there are plenty of wonderful people in our city who never finished college, but as city leaders there are numerous reasons why we want our young people to aim for a college degree, and why we want to attract more college-educated residents.

Those with a college degree on average will earn over a million dollars more in their lifetime than those without. This has a significant impact on city sales tax receipts. Only 1% of college graduates receive public assistance, only 3.6% of college graduates live below the poverty line, and only 2.9% of jail inmates have a college degree. In the current recession, the unemployment rate for college graduates is half the state average. There are enormous societal, financial, and demographic benefits to having more college graduates in West Valley City. So our fourth goal is this: **Increase the number of college graduates in West Valley City through cultivating partnerships with higher education institutions, developing programs to foster employment and housing that will attract college graduates, and through educating existing residents.**

“S” is for sustainability. We need to hold the line on spending, plan for future capital expenditures, and ensure that our city’s balance sheet remains sustainable as we

head into the uncertain years ahead. We want to make sure that taxes are fair, yet we also want to make sure our future needs are covered, whether it is that procrastinated road repair that someday we won't be able to put off any longer, or whether it is that new fire station that someday we will just have to build. So our big goal regarding fiscal sustainability is this: **Provide both efficient and effective services and develop a sustainable facilities plan that accommodates future needs.**

“T” is for transitioning neighborhoods. The demographics of our neighborhoods are changing. Our housing stock in many neighborhoods is aging. Prominent roads in our city that once were desirable places for single-family homes are becoming frantic commuter corridors. Families are outgrowing their homes and moving. We need to face these new realities as our neighborhoods evolve and work to transition them into the best that they can be. We need to execute on our new programs to encourage homeowner reinvestment, and we need to leverage the human capital in neighborhoods to better look out for each other. So our sixth and final goal is this: **Enhance our residential neighborhoods and plan for emerging residential changes and lifestyles by maintaining existing programs, strengthening the co-creator concept and creating new neighborhood associations.**

There you have it, G-O-W-E-S-T. Horace Greeley was right. It remains sound advice to “Go West, young man.” And here in West Valley City we seek to keep alive that spirit of hope, opportunity, and a brighter tomorrow that the spirit of the west has always signified.

As city elected officials, and city staff, we are working harder than ever to make sure the star of the west still beacons. We love this city. I love West Valley City. We are honored to serve the wonderful people of this special place at this exciting time.

As the author of *The Hobbit*, J.R.R. Tolkien penned *Bilbo's Last Song*, he scrawled "I seek the West, I seek the West, And fields and mountains ever blest." As we continue to hasten the ascendency of West Valley City, may the paths and parks, homes and shops, fields and mountains be so ever blest!

Thank you.